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Hemendra Acharya hemacharya@yahoo.com
Call It India

Attached is a letter from a Professor Emeritus of Harvard University published in yesterday's New York Times stating that India before 1947 should also be called India for historical purposes and not be called South Asia. I am sending this for your information prior to the meeting next Thursday. Thanks.

Hemendra Acharya
(949) 336-8676

Call It India

MAY 12, 2016

To the Editor:

Re “[Debate Erupts in California Over How Curriculum Should Portray India](#)” (news article, May 6):

In the debate over how to portray ancient India, and the use of the term “India,” current scholars of India, in particular political scientists, have intervened, preferring to use the term “South Asia,” which is also used at Harvard as the name for the academic unit that deals with the Indian subcontinent.

Even those preferring this clumsy alternative do not shy away from the term “Indian” for the subcontinent — even your headline writer cannot evade the term “India.”

For ancient India, as known to the classical Greeks and to Alexander, and to Greek and Roman geographers, to Portuguese adventurers, to 17th- and 18th-century British, French and Dutch merchants, to British imperialists, what other term, or some equivalent, would serve?

They could not conceive of it as “South Asia.” They knew it as a distinctive civilization, stretching from the Indus to the Ganges, from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean (and should we change that name, too?), with its own ancient languages, and classic texts, and religions descended from them.

“South Asia” is in vogue to avoid offending Pakistan and Bangladesh, but for history before 1947 no other term will serve.

NATHAN GLAZER

Cambridge, Mass.

The writer, the sociologist, is professor emeritus at Harvard.

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